

John 17:11b-19. ¹¹ Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. ¹³ “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

With promises, prayer, and purpose, Christ sends his children out in the world.

1. He promises to protect his own.
2. He sets us apart for God's good purpose.
3. Know that Jesus speaks on your behalf

My prayer is that you protect them... not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. Such is the loving concern of Jesus expressed in what is commonly known as Jesus' high priestly prayer. Jesus prays to the Father on behalf of his disciples on the night that he was betrayed. Jesus knew first-hand the dangers of the world that he was sending them out into. He knew how the world would hate them, even hurt them, and try to push them off the solid foundation of their faith. But Jesus prays that the Father would hold them in his hands, while also enabling them and equipping them to go out into the world for God's good purpose. On this momentous occasion of his betrayal as he was handed over to his death, Jesus prays this high priestly prayer as his disciples were on his heart and mind. With promises, prayer, and purpose Jesus was preparing for the time when he would send his disciples out into the world with the message of salvation through his death and resurrection. With all that was pressing down on him, he still made it clear that his thoughts were on his disciples, and how his spiritual children would fair out in this world. What genuine love of your Savior is reflected in these verses!

What relatable love, perhaps as well! As graduates all around the country, step across that stage, there may be more than a few parents who can relate to having concerns about how their loved ones might fair out in the real world. As parents and students commemorate a momentous occasion and wonderful milestone, there is also some trepidation for parents and students as they consider the next step. After the

parties, after the celebration, after a few short weeks, or a quick few months, there is an unknown factor as young men and women head out into a whole new environment. For those young people filled with excitement, there is also some anxiety stepping off that stage into the unknown of college or the workforce or a whole new life. And in a certain sense, as things begin to open up a bit more in our everyday world there is a bit of reintroduction to society happening among people of every age. There may be some anxiety that goes along with all of that.

And so we wonder. What now? Are we ready for what is to come? Are we ready, are my kids or grandkids ready, as they will soon be exposed to different challenges, including challenges to their faith in Christ? Are we ready to go out into the world and live for Jesus and show his love to others, or have we been so turned inward the last few months by our innate desire to survive that we have lost sight of God's call to be light in the world? Are we ready to go out into the world and reflect the love of Christ to all that we meet or has the absorption of divisive rhetoric entrenched ourselves into such extreme positions that we have little time or patience or love for those outside of our own engineered zones? Are we ready to go out into the world and be the body of Christ or would we rather stay so separate and so distant that we continue to shut the world out? Would a part of us prefer to stay locked away in our ivory towers as we smugly look down at the evil and immoral world below us?

Or maybe it's the other extreme. Maybe we so desire and long for exposure and contact with the outside world that we are quick to be once again enamored with the ways of this world. The shiny seductions of the habits and cultures around us are even more shiner than before. Be careful that you do not throw yourselves so fully back into the world that you are dragged away by it completely.

The evil foe is fast at work to drag us away in one ditch or the other, isn't he?

But our Savior is fast at work as well and he is steadfast in his superior love and care for us. We are, therefore, comforted and strengthened, and sent on our proper way by this high priestly prayer of our Savior. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, on the night that he was handed over to death for all sinners, he acts as the intercessory that we need before a holy God. On this night filled with anxiety and pain and personal anguish, his thoughts were turned remarkably outward. He thought of his disciples both near and far. For those twelve that were around him and for all those who would ever believe in the gospel, he prayed for them too. He even thought of you. He prayed for you and me. His prayer is for protection - especially from the spiritual forces that would seek to strip us of our faith. But that did not mean that he would pray for some complete isolation and being cut off from the world. He prayed that the Father would protect his children and that he would also enable them to go out into the world. As messengers of his grace, of reflections of his light, Jesus prayed the Father would enable his children to go out into the world with purpose. To serve as salt and light, he would send out his spiritual children to bring a dash of his goodness to the world and to shine as a reflection of his light in a world so filled with darkness. ¹⁵ ***My prayer***

is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. Jesus had a purpose in saying this and in sending his disciples out into the world. Even though they would be tested, our Lord God could use this testing for their good and for the good of those around him.

Allow for a personal story as I attempt to further illustrate and apply this lesson. In the summer between high school and college, I remember playing amateur baseball with a friend from Luther Prep School. I would be heading off to Martin Luther College and he would be heading off to a public university. Both of us were sons of pastors and this summer we would be heading out of our bubble and out into the world a little bit more than before. (And with driver's licenses and access to vehicles we would be heading out on our own more than before.) As we went out in this world, we would be sharing the field and spending time with young men who had a very different view of the world and a way about them than what we were used to. And I remember the word of advice that my friend's father would often give to the two of us. As we got ready for each game, we would very often follow the same pattern. We would talk about the upcoming game, grab something to eat, make sure we had all our equipment, and then before we would head out on our way, Pastor Meier would say to us something to this effect, remember *even though you are in the world, you are not of the world.* We knew what he meant, and we knew that he meant well.

We wouldn't always follow his advice the best. The ways of this world and the influence around us would lead these two young men to say and do things that were not a proper reflection of our faith. That is true for people of any age and not just teenagers. For that we confess our sins and also know that we are forgiven in Christ. But during this same experience, we also had an opportunity to give a quiet testimony to our faith and to stand out by our God-pleasing actions. There were even a few opportunities to give a reason for the hope that we had as well. I'm sure our parents had some concerns, but all in all, it was an experience that helped us both grow in our faith, probably more than we know.

However, it was not merely the experience that led to such growth in our faith. It was ultimately, a connection to the Word of God that was nurtured and maintained that was vital in growing our faith. That was key, that was vital! For it by this precious means of grace, the Word of God, that the Holy Spirit answers this prayer for spiritual protection. We hear that vital component of a continual connection with the Word of God emphasized in Jesus' prayer. He speaks to the Father that he has given his disciples the word that the Father had given to him. And then in his prayer, he pleads. *Sanctify them by the truth your word is truth.* Here he speaks of a continual setting apart and making holy through the Word of Truth. Hearing the good news of the bible, hearing on a continual basis the truth of human sin and God's unfailing grace, reviewing the promises of God fulfilled in Christ that saves us from the judgment that our sins deserve, recounting how Christ our Messiah came to save us from our sin and to make us children of God, this would be of chief importance for the preservation of

souls. First for those first few disciples and then for all those who would follow as well, this was Jesus' prayer. ***Sanctify them by the truth, your Word is truth.***

And we will echo this prayer today as we close with prayer.

O Holy Spirit, continue to go about your gracious work, as you build up and strengthen our faith through Word and Sacrament. According to the prayer of our Savior and our echoes of his concern, O Holy Spirit, watch over us and keep us in the faith. We pray especially for our graduates and for those that are facing milestones or challenges in life. Bring about proper humility and dependence on you for those who are too puffed up on their accomplishments. We pray that you would lift up and be with those who are crushed by anxiety. Chase away fear and doubt by the assurance of your abiding presence. O risen and ascended Lord, you promise to strengthen us against the attacks of the devil, the world, and our flesh, send you Holy Spirit working through the Word that we may be daily renewed in the faith as we serve you now and forever. O Lord, as this world, corrupted by sin and wickedness and evil turns viciously against your people, keep us firmly rooted in your Word so that we might not just survive but thrive as your holy people. Set us apart and daily renew us by your means of grace, so that we may be encouraged and enabled to exercise our faith by proclaiming your name in all that we say and do. Equipped with your promises, prayers, and purpose lead us out into the world as reflections of your love and goodness, send us out into the world in ways that serve, build up, and extend your kingdom to the glory of your name. Amen.